

Christian Coach A-Rod Had Fired Prophesies God's Love Over Third Baseman

I've always loved the term "We've come full circle." Circles are my favorite shape. They ring themselves around life like God's bow around a package—and a few weeks ago, God drew a circle around a part of our life in the game of baseball.

After spending 32 years in the game, you begin to think nothing will surprise you, but Bobby and I were surprised one cloudy morning in October 2009 when we received a call from the Yankees' general manager explaining we lost our job as third base coach for the team we loved. He told us **Alex Rodriguez** got us fired by complaining to the owners, citing he was uncomfortable with Bobby as a coach.

We were stunned. Was it because I had consoled his wife (now ex-wife) and prayed with her about the struggles she was enduring in their marriage? (A week later, A-Rod was publicly palling around with Madonna.) Was it because Bobby was closer to other infielders on the team and A-Rod felt threatened? Could he sense a spiritual tug as we covered him in daily **prayer**, for us only to get thrown under the bus by the very man we prayed for?

Whatever the case, the fallout from that firing was painful. We counted a financial loss of around \$1.2 million as the Yankees went on to win the World Series the next year and had many playoff appearances and pay increases in the years to follow. We spent 16 years in the minor leagues before landing that job, each of us working two to three jobs apiece to try and make ends meet. We knew our hope was in the Lord, but at times it was difficult to watch A-Rod garner a string of titles and accolades. His stunning looks and baseball

presence seemed to keep him exempt from the harsh winter of reality. Even after allegations of performance-enhancing drug use stung A-Rod's stellar record of accomplishments a few years ago, he seemed unfazed by consequence or regret.

A few weeks ago, the minor league team Bobby manages for the Toronto Blue Jays had a double-header with the Tampa Yankees. And there on third base was A-Rod, nursing a hip injury as he staged a rehab stint on his way back to the big league team. Bobby has seen A-Rod in passing over the years, but this visit proved to be more.

It was a "full circle" encounter if there ever was one. Alex's eyes locked on Bobby as he moved toward the coach's box next to third base. As Bobby thrust his hand out to shake, Alex lunged forward into an awkward hug—the kind of hug that lasts a bit longer and holds a bit tighter than usual. A bit stunned, Bobby pulled back and looked Alex in the eye. As the pitcher took extra time to warm up, Bobby realized God was giving him the gift of time—stolen moments to speak into this ball player's life.

"I've been **praying** for you, Alex," Bobby said with a warmth in his smile. "I know you're going through a lot right now, and I want to tell you something."

Alex remained frozen on third base. As if time stood still, he leaned in to listen.

"All the things you're going through right now [a drug investigation by Major League Baseball and the threat of a lifetime ban from baseball]—it's too much for you to handle on your own," Bobby said. "Without God, you'll struggle to make it."

Alex listened intently as Bobby continued.

"I want you to know that you're not alone. The Lord is with you, and He won't fail you. No matter what you've done or what

lies ahead, He loves you.”

Alex quietly lifted his voice as his eyes looked through Bobby, as if he was in communion with something Bobby couldn't see. “I guess I'm learning what's really important,” he whispered.

“You are,” said Bobby, “so don't forget what God teaches you.”

As Bobby moved to his perch in the coach's box and Alex took his position at third, I swear you could see a full circle drawn around these men. Isn't it like God to have the last word when we let Him? Hope, fear and forgiveness tied in a bow.

We may never have another conversation with A-Rod, but God knew a circle needed to be drawn, and Bobby was the one to draw it. He could have snubbed Alex with an unforgiving glance or smirked in pleasure, watching Alex grapple with his current life predicament—but when you've encountered the God who loves, all you want to do is share that gift. The gift of coming full circle.

Garri Meacham *is an author, speaker and teacher. Her next book, Watershed Moments, is coming out in October 2013.*